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ENG 3099G-098-099: Myth and Culture (Honors)

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English 3099G, Sections 098 & 099 (Fall 2002)*Myth and Culture, honors*

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Office Hours: M 10-noon; TuTh 9:30-11

Section 098: TuTh 12:30 – 1:45
Section 099: TuTh 8:00-9:15
Coleman 3160

Course Description

The catalog describes this course as follows: Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding. You will find, however, as you talk to your peers, that each instructor teaches this course a bit differently, with different texts and emphases. So... what sets *this* section apart?

In terms of format, I like to see a lively class. I will do whatever I can to keep you awake and involved and interested. Don't be surprised to see a lot of small group interaction and a variety of activities. *I do not* want to hear myself talk 150 minutes a week and I doubt you do either.

Because this is an honors class, I make certain assumptions: among these are that you are self-motivated, that you know how to use the library, and that I can trust you enough not to have to give quizzes. There will be times when the subject matter for the course will be based on your outside research. We will not limit ourselves to the text, and we will not always all be reading the same thing.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, I expect you to *know*...

- what myths are and how they function
- the role of myth in shaping community and individual identity
- what some of the beliefs and customs of ancient peoples, especially the Tibetans, Navajos, and Mayans are
- what some of the myths of the Tibetan Buddhists, Navajos, and Mayans are
- the significance of similarities and differences among cultural myths and beliefs
- that all people have myths, whether they know it or not

With this knowledge, I expect you to be able to...

- break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers
- recognize your own prejudices
- recognize similarities among cultures
- be able to read a myth from any culture and draw some tentative conclusions about that culture
- recognize and be able to analyze your own culture and mythology
- learn different ways of teaching about cultures and texts
- enjoy

Texts

Dundes, *Sacred Narrative*
 I, *Rigoberta Menchu*
 Lhalungpa, *Life of Milarepa*
 Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*
 Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane'*
 Tapahonso, *Saanii Dahataal*
 Library reserve readings

There is a *lot* of reading in this course, some selections easier than others. Thus, discipline will be rewarded, procrastination will get you into trouble. You will enjoy most of the selections, I hope; the issues they deal with are relevant in our culture today, even if the names are strange.

Films

Popol Vuh
Dalai Lama: Soul of Tibet
Pedagogy of Place

Movies do not mean a day off. Be an active viewer: *think* about what you see and hear.

Grade Breakdown: Calculator:

Response Journal	300 points
Paper 1 (teachers)	100 points
Paper 2 (places)	100 points
Paper 3 (myth and belief)	250 points
Class Myth	100 points
<u>Participation</u>	<u>150 points</u>
Total	1000 points

Course Grade

901-1000 points	A
801-900 points	B
701-800 points	C
601-700 points	D
0-600 points	F

Words of Advice on Grades

Adequate, Average work will earn you a 'C' in this course. If you merely go through the motions, but do so with a certain amount of skill, you are an average (i.e. 'C') student. If you merely go through the motions without much skill, you may very well earn a 'D'; missing deadlines consistently or racking up lots of absences may also lead to a 'D'. Good work, i.e. extra effort and good quality product will earn you a 'B.' Excellent work, i.e. going above and beyond the requirements for assignments, using both skill and creativity, should earn you an 'A.' Keep in mind that doing an assignment is no guarantee of an 'A' or 'B'—you must also do it well. If you are shooting for a particular grade in this course, I advise that you come see me *early* so we can discuss how you might best achieve that grade. I do *not* care what grade you *need*; I will do whatever I can to help you *earn* the grade you *want*.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the Office of disability Services at 581-6583 (9th St. Hall).

Electronic Writing Portfolio

If you need a paper from this class for your Electronic Writing Portfolio, please see me for guidelines

English Department Policy on Plagiarism

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"the appropriation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Assignment Summary (More detailed assignment sheets forthcoming)

1. Journal

Each week during the semester, you will be expected to write at least 500 words in a response journal, documenting what you think about the reading, films, discussions. I will pick these up periodically for evaluation purposes; grades will be based not so much on grammar and style, but on the thought and reflection displayed in the writing. You may start with what you like and don't like about a particular story or what you find strange, but then take the discussion deeper, trying to interpret the meaning and function of the story, comparing it to other things we read or to theoretical perspectives. **Journals for 12:30 section due every Thursday; journals for 8:00 section due every Tuesday.**

2. Papers

Because the journal and class discussions will cover the reading in some detail, we are going to use the papers to reflect on these same themes on a more personal level. In other words, what relevance does all this have on *your* life?

a. Teacher Essay

Much of *The Life of Milarepa* turns on the protagonist's relationship with his teacher or spiritual guide. In this essay, you will reflect upon the important teachers in your own life. These may include, but are not limited to, school teachers.

b. Place Essay

Most myths are centered around a particular place, often a scared space. This essay will reflect the role of place and home in your life.

c. Myth and Belief Essay

On December 10, you will hand in the final draft of an essay that demonstrates what you think about the impact that myth has on your own life and the impact you perceive it to have on others. There will be no final in this class, so this assignment and the class storytelling session are meant to sum up and draw some conclusions from what you have learned. The quotations on the syllabus will help you find a focus your essay.

3. Class Myth

During the final period scheduled for this class, we will assemble and create our own myths and stories. this is a mandatory assignment, but a creative one, in which, now that you all will have a good sense of what myth is, you will become the mythtellers!

4. Participation

A passing grade in participation means showing up and being prepared for class. Higher grades are based on your level of engagement in discussion, group work, and presentations.

Questions??

If I've forgotten something or you have questions at any time, please feel free to drop by my office (3871 Coleman)

SYLLABUS

"Myths are other people's religion." (Sam Keen)

Tu Aug 27 Introduction
Forms of Oral Narrative; What is Myth?

Th Aug 29 How do we interpret myth?
Introduction to *Sacred Narrative* (1-3); Lauri Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth" (41-52); William Bascom, "Forms of Folklore" (5-29).
"Living by Wonder." *Parabola* 22:1 (Spring 1997) 62-64.

"The real point of myth is not to give an objective world picture; what is expressed in it, rather, is how we human beings understand ourselves in the world."
(Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian)

Tu Sep 3 Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism
Life of Milarepa, pp. 9-35

Th Sep 5 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 39-74
"Your Cell Will Teach You Everything." *Parabola* 25:3 (August 2000) 33-38

"Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words"
(Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)

Tu Sep 10 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 75-152
(You may skip the poems.)

Th Sep 12 *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 153-197
(You may skip the poems.)
"An Essential Commitment." *Parabola* 25:3 (August 2000) 39-43
"Elimination of Desires" handout

"Myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the supernatural) into the World. Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true story,' because it deals with *realities*. The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the World is there to prove it."
(Mircea Eliade, Myth scholar)

Tu Sep 17 "Dalai Lama's Dilemma." *Foreign Affairs* 77:1 (Jan/Feb 1998) p83 (15p);
"Tibet Embraces the New Year." *National Geographic* Volume 197, issue 1 (Jan 2000) p 82 (12pp); "Hollywood's Newest Star: Tibet." *Christian Science Monitor*. Volume 89, Issue 236 (31 October 1997) p1.
Film: *Dalai Lama: Soul of Tibet*

Th Sep 19 "An Old Nun Tells Her Story." In *Tales of Tibet*, 163-175.
"A God without Gender." In *Tales of Tibet*, 177-188.

"Myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates the inner meaning of the universe and of human life."
(Alan Watts, British expositor of Buddhism to the West)

Tu Sep 24 **Paper 1 Workshop**

Th Sep 26 Introduction to Navajo Myth and Culture
Dine Bahane, 35-78

"Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends that are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true."
(Robert Graves, British poet and myth scholar)

Tu Oct 1 *Dine Bahane*, 81-142
Paper 1 due

Th Oct 3 *Dine Bahane*, 142-168
Raffaele Pettazzoni, "The Truth of Myth," *Sacred Narrative*, pp. 98-109

"The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth."
(Aristotle, Greek philosopher)

Tu Oct 8 *Dine Bahane*, 171-224
Th. Van Baaren, "The Flexibility of Myth," *Sacred Narrative*, pp. 217-224

Th Oct 10 *Dine Bahane*, 224-278

"Myth gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe."
(Claude Levi-Strauss, French anthropologist)

Tu Oct 15 *Dine Bahane*, 281-317

Th Oct 17 "The Long Walk to Bosque Redondo," *Smithsonian* 28:9 (Dec 1997) p46ff
"Telling the Holy," *Parabola* 18:2 (Summer 1993) 4-9.
Saanii Dahataal, pp. 7-10
Film: *Pedagogy of Place*

"Myths are the daydreaming of the human race."
(Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis)

Tu Oct 22 *Saanii Dahataal*, preface and pp. 1-4, 17-20, 41-42, 53-54, 67-68, 85-92

Th Oct 24 **Paper 2 workshop**

"These things never happened, yet they always are."
(Saloustios, 4th century Greek scholar)

Tu Oct 29 Introduction to Mayan Myth and Culture
Paper 2 due

Th Oct 31 Popol Vuh, parts 1 & 2

"There is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it. Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity."
(F. Max Müller, Linguist and scholar of myth)

Tu Nov 5 *Popol Vuh* film

Th Nov 7 *Popol Vuh*, Part 3

"Myth explains the why and how of here and now"
(Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)

Tu Nov 12 *Popol Vuh*, Part 3 (cont'd)

Th Nov 14 *Popol Vuh*, Part 4, pp. 145-161
"The Fall of the Maya." *Earth* 4:5 (Oct 1995) p. 22ff.
Film: *Forests of the Maya*

"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."
(Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)

Tu Nov 19 **Paper 3 workshop**

Th Nov 21 I, Rigoberta Menchu, chapters I-VII
Paper 3 draft due

"Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change."
(Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*)

*** Thanksgiving Break ***
*** Thanksgiving Break ***

"Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death."
(Joseph Campbell, Myth Scholar)

Tu Dec 3 I, Rigoberta Menchu, chapters VIII-XXI

Th Dec 5 I, Rigoberta Menchu, chapters XXII-XXVIII

"Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of both."
(George Santayana, Philosopher)

Tu Dec 10 I, Rigoberta Menchu, chapters XXIX-XXXIV
Paper 3 final draft due

Th Dec 12 Preparation for Class Myth

"To create a myth, that is to say, to venture behind the reality of the sense to find a superior reality, is the most manifest sign of the greatness of the human soul and the proof of its capacity for infinite growth and development."
(Louis-Auguste Sabatier, French Protestant Theologian)

Tu Dec 17, 2:45pm Class Myth for 12:30 section
Th Dec 19, 8:00am Class Myth for 8:00 section